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MY VISIT TO A RURAL SETTLEMENT

I planned to visit Nitashindwa settlement leaving the capital early on the morning of August 2nd, arriving there on the same evening, spending 3rd and 4th there, and returning on 5th. In this way I thought I would get two clear days at Nitashindwa, allowing plenty of time to check up on progress in building the two schools and the health centre, see how the seed distribution programme was getting along, meet some of the secondary schoolboys who wanted to continue their education, have a thorough discussion with the Commandant and broach with him some rather delicate protection questions, see if the food issues were adequate and why the reporting system seems to have broken down, check what wages are being paid and of course have plenty of time to meet and listen to the refugees.

Unfortunately, on the evening of 1 August:

- the Minister of Home Affairs sent a message asking to see me the following morning,
- the Landrover broke down,
- I received a cable from Geneva asking me to meet a journalist on the afternoon of 2nd,
- my child was sick,
- I developed psychosomatic dysentery (I detest field visits),
- I realised that 4th was a national public holiday.

But I am made of stern stuff. I did not give up. I

- saw the Minister,
- borrowed a Landrover from UNDP and sent the UNECR one for repair,
- saw the journalist,
- took my child to hospital and comforted my wife,
- dosed myself with Mexaform,
- (of course) put duty before holidays,

and just managed to leave with the office driver after supper on the evening of 2nd. We drove through the night, stopped at midnight at a small hotel, and continued the next morning, arriving at 14.00 on 3rd. It was hot and I was tired. The Commandant was nowhere to be found, but his clerk said that as I had not arrived the night before he had cancelled the programme for my visit. I was to have seen the schoolboys that morning.



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The clerk said that the Commandant had gone to the far end of the settlement, so I set out to look for him. Unfortunately, although we drove around all afternoon we did not find him. When we returned to the Headquarters it was already 17.00. I was reluctant to do anything before I had seen the Commandant, but I decided to see the Agricultural Officer. Unfortunately, he had just left for his home some 40 miles away in order to spend the public holiday there. By now my stomach was giving trouble again, so I went to the Guest House and tried to recuperate. Just as it was getting dark the Commandant turned up. He did not seem very pleased. He said that it would be impossible to reassemble the secondary schoolboys. He himself had to go the next morning to the regional headquarters for the celebration of the national holiday, and the food distribution staff would all be off work. I was of course welcome to see what I wanted on the settlement. He did not seem in a very good mood. I offered him a drink. He said he had been a teetotaler for twenty years. It did not seem opportune to broach the delicate protection questions.

In the night it rained. The next morning I felt a bit weak and depressed but after a breakfast of buttered Lomotil, as used by the astronauts, (the Mexaform had not been strong enough), I set out for my remaining day on the settlement. Unfortunately neither my driver nor I spoke the refugees' language. I decided that the best thing to do was to look at the two schools which were under construction and also the health centre buildings. Then at least I would have something to report when I got back. Unfortunately, when we were about five miles from the Headquarters the Landrover got stuck. It began to rain again. Some refugees pushed us out. We got stuck twice more before reaching the first school at midday. Unfortunately, the teachers and contractor were all away, but I could see that much more work remained to be done than had been reported. I took detailed notes. I was worried whether we would be able to get back to the Headquarters, so we abandoned the proposal to visit the second school and the Health Centre and set off back. On the way we got stuck again. A gust of wind blew my notes out of the Landrover. They fell with the writing side downwards on wet mud. Some refugees pushed us out. One of them was a secondary schoolboy who spoke a very little English. He seemed to be saying that the refugees had no food, but I could not make much sense out of it all. We got back to Headquarters as night was falling.

The next day we drove back to the capital. My child had recovered. The Landrover had been repaired but I remembered that I should have obtained authorisation from Geneva before having the work done. I wrote a report from memory about the unfinished school.

I do not think I shall be able to get away to the rural areas again for some time. There is so much to do here in the city. You have only to look at the queue of refugees outside my door to see what I mean.

9 February 1976